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**Intercultural competency of university teachers as a demand of education in
21st century**

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Abstract:

Once with accession to the European Union, new requirements related to education at university level must be respected and promoted. Emphasis should be put on values such as tolerance, mutual respect, acceptance of otherness so on. These things imply that university teachers and, not only, to possess multiple skills enabling to promote among undergraduates students cultural values, intercultural communication which leads to performance and progress for everyone involved in the educational system. But it is extremely difficult to achieve these goals if the intercultural competency is not correctly defined, described.

In this article we will try to discover the structure of intercultural competency in order to promote it among university teachers, undergraduates students to achieve it and to apply it in the educational context.

Keywords: intercultural competency, mutual respect, tolerance, educational system, intercultural communication.

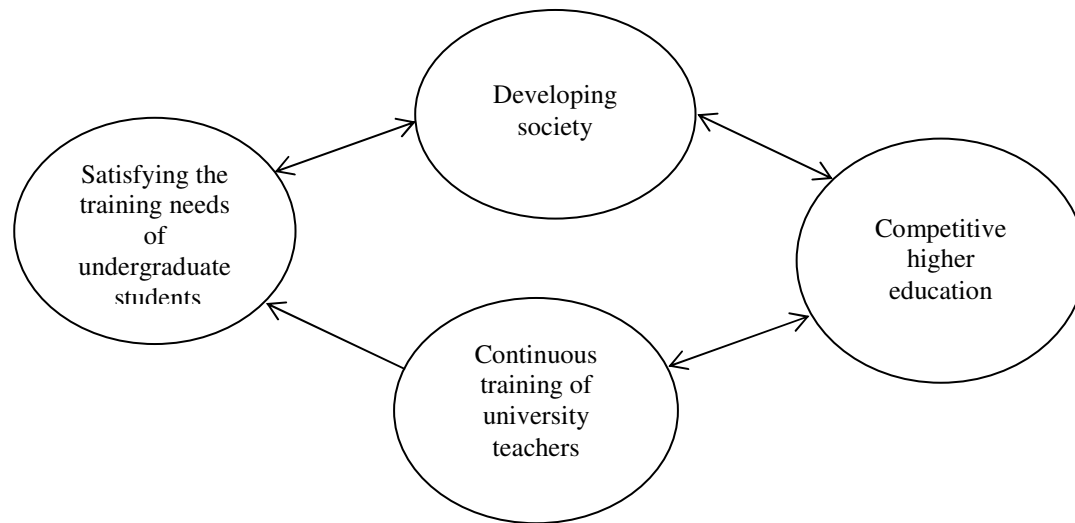
1. University teacher training –relevance and impact

In a society that is changing, education is the only one which contributes to stability, but also to its development. Quality education depends heavily on the quality of the educators, on the initial and continuous training of them. The role of the trainer, in general, and the trainer at the university level, in particular, is very complex, since it must demonstrate adaptability, flexibility and plasticity, in teaching, but also to meet the needs of students and to respect the requirements of the Ministry of Education, constantly changing.

The relationship between the needs of society, on the one hand, and higher education needs, teachers practicing in this field, on the other hand, can be represented in Figure 1.

Each society forms its own teachers in order to succeed in achieving higher goals. The teacher training in general and academics in particular, is very complex, training which will meet the intellectual challenges. In connection with this, we set as an example the current period in which the Romanian education is passing through a genuine crisis, driven by the need to adapt to the requirements of the European Union, and all efforts were directed in this society. There are many

changes in all fields, but especially in education to ensure quality and adaptability in higher education.



↔ - *mutual conditioning*

→ or ← - *unilateral conditioning*

Fig. 1: The relationship between society-higher education-university teachers and undergraduates students

In these conditions, teacher training at university level proves to be a necessity. Training of trainers consists on initial and continuing preparation of educators "initial and continuing training should equip the teacher with necessary skills so that they feel comfortable in the class, in all situations that may arise when he is teaching "(Gliga, ed. 2002, pp. 10-11).

2. Competences of the trainer at the university level

Competence is defined as "an intellectual capacity that has various possibilities of transfer (communication skills, selecting relevant information, assessment information, etc.), capacity which contains affective, motivational and attitudinal elements." (Clubs, 1998, p 101).

Competence is based on some innate traits, but can be developed only after many learning activities. These features should be found in time, only by practicing a person may achieve maximum development potential. If it is not found, remain dormant, which not only confirms certain weaknesses of the education system which doesn't involves people specially prepared, or even teachers to recognize potential talents and to guide students to certain fields where they can excel.

We present, in the figure 2, the elements of competence:

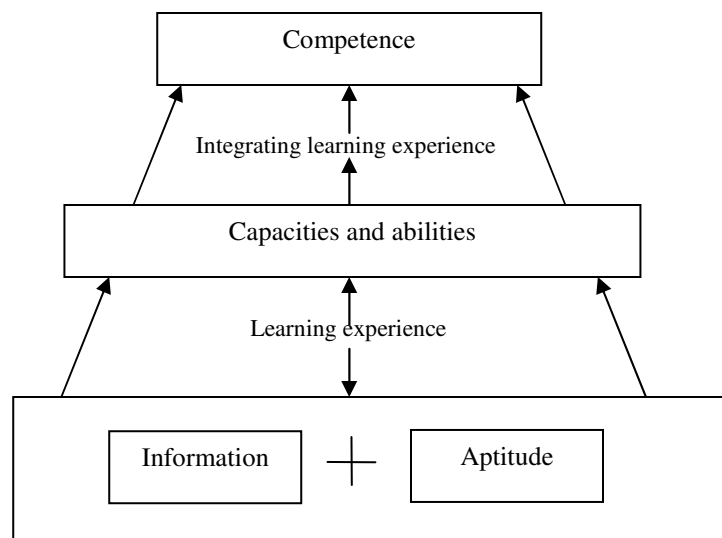


Fig. 2: The competence' structure

In another sense, competence is described as being **"implemented capacity, used in various situations which has appropriate or assumed roles, for the successful resolution of various tasks, issues, actions in a rationally and creatively way"** (Joita, 2000 , p 182).

Training of trainers on basic skills has grown in the U.S. in the '60s and '70s, considered to be "the most effective way to train teachers" which especially means them achieving the minimum level of performance on specific tasks of teaching.

Training of trainers at the university level in terms of skills needed in teaching activities should follow several paths, as is happening departments of university teacher education of the largest universities in Europe:

- through individual and confidential consultations on issues of teaching;
- through activities carried out by trainers;
- by helping the courses' evaluator to plan, deliver and evaluate curriculum;
- by developing programs, workshops and seminars to support teachers who are especially concerned to streamline their teaching activities with students;
- through specialized courses which could be completed by a diploma or masters level qualifications;
- by encouraging the university teachers to conduct research in order to increase the quality of teaching and learning activities, so on.. (Ramsden, 1992, p. 262).

Towards the end of the century, train of trainers on basic skills hasn't an equally theoretical importance, but a practical one, because, gaining experience in teaching, the trainer will be able to build the skills necessary for the profession which has choose it.

Thus, as the trainer is able to form the necessary skills to practice, he will improve his work, managing to achieve a good quality work and contribute to improving the educational system.

3. Intercultural competence-definition

The term „intercultural” in educational space, involves the acquisition, by undergraduates students belonging to a minority culture (ethnic, religious, racial, etc.), of information on customs and history of the majority culture while preserving the right to have them own cultural identity and, in the same time, using its in different social contexts.

Intercultural means:

- Recognize different representations, references and multiple values;
- Dialogue and exchange between individuals and groups which have multiple values;
- Misalignment and interrogation about egocentric references which must be based on reciprocity;
- The dynamic relationship between culture or cultural elements, taken together (cf. Perregaux, Ch, 1994)

A first survey on intercultural competence shows many words and phrases that were used in society, in teaching, research and beyond, as synonyms of intercultural competence, including the following terms: cross-cultural adaptation, intercultural awareness, multicultural competence, cross-cultural competence, global, cultural competence, etc..

Byram (1997) concluded that there are a lot of issues to be considered in trying to define intercultural competence, such as emphasis on knowledge about cultures and cultural practices vs. skills "to analyze consciously" interactions between cultures; the role of nonverbal communication in forming intercultural competence; the limits within which the concept of intercultural competence should be defined; focusing on psychological traits versus "capacity to act," and the influence of social factors and policy on defining and assessing competence of intercultural communication (Byram, M., 1997, p 30).

It can be defined in various ways, we will provide some definitions of it.

Intercultural competence can be considered the capacity of understanding the behavior of members of a culture and behave in an appropriate manner towards them. Intercultural competence therefore involves understanding all aspects of a culture, but in particular those related to the social structure of community, values and beliefs of its members, how they interact, as well as their ways of thinking and to act.

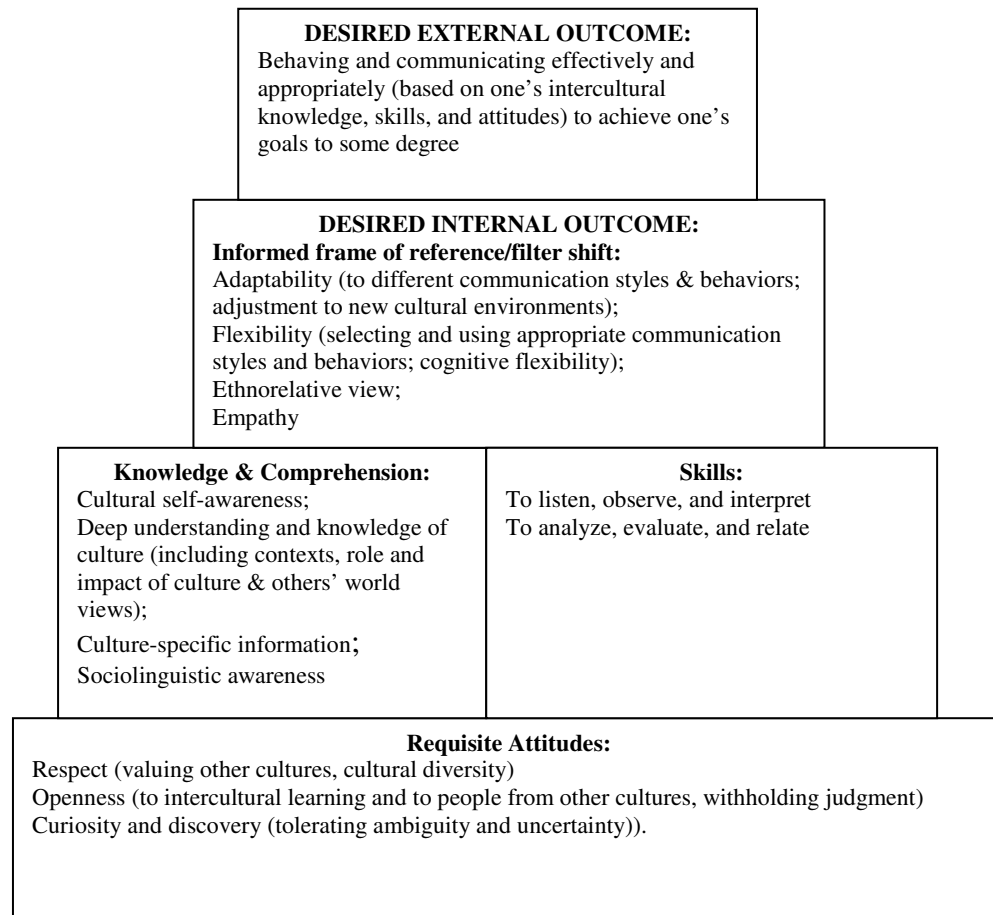
Intercultural competence is the ability to communicate successfully with people from other cultures. This ability may be innate or can be developed / improved (<http://en.wikipedia.org>). Intercultural sensitivity plays an important role in building and strengthening intercultural competence. A person who possesses this power can understand, in interaction with people from foreign cultures, their culture-specific concepts, how they perceive things, they think, feel and act.

4. The structure and ways to develop the intercultural competence

With reference to our educational context we can say that the university teacher's intercultural competence involves the ability to facilitate, among pupils and students, communication between cultures, to promote values such as tolerance, acceptance of others, empathy, respect for the beliefs and values that animates other cultures, etc.

In other words, the university teacher must show, first, the ability to communicate both with colleagues,

members of the local scientific community and the students belonging to different cultural areas in order to create an encouraging climate and cooperative work leading to achieving goals - and the ability to adapt his professional objectives to requirements imposed by interculturality. The following is a model of intercultural competence that is proposed by DK Deardorff:



Pyramid Model of Intercultural Competence (Deardorff, 2006. 2009)

In accordance with the model proposed by Deardorff, the essential elements of intercultural competence are: attitude + skills + knowledge + its character specific traits, all of them can be formed and developed only in conditions in which individuals interact with minority cultures. Starting from this model, we can say that it can be assimilated by all teachers, including university ones.

The intercultural education can not be done with undergraduates students and if the university teachers from different department does not have this competence and do not believe in the objectives and principles that promote intercultural education because both teachers and pupils / students must show:

- tolerance for ambiguity;
- behavioral flexibility;
- sociability and interest in others;
- empathy;

- unconditional acceptance;
- meta-communication skills.

So, the role of university teachers is to convince undergraduates students to accept otherness as something natural, and to persuade them to define themselves in relation to others. Moreover, we must always determine undergraduates students to relate in order to deal with situations problems that may arise and to solve common tasks.

In other words, he must always appeal to active and participative methods to promote intercultural education and its goals in school and extra space. It is an extremely difficult task which involves, as we can see, to form values and attitudes, specific skills, behaviors that converge to what is intercultural competence.

Kealey (1990) realizes profile a person who has this competence specifying its characteristic notes:

- ability to adapt;
- modesty and respect;
- understand the concept of culture;
- knowledge of the host country and its culture;
- ability to build relationships;
- self-knowledge;
- intercultural communication;
- organizational skills;
- personal and professional involvement.

5. Conclusions

Summarizing, we can say that the structure of intercultural competence involves:

- attitudes: curiosity and openness to new, readiness to suspend negative beliefs about other cultures and their own culture;
- knowledge about various social groups (ethnic, religious, etc..), their culture and current practices;
- interpretation and relationship skills: ability to interpret a document or an event belonging to another culture, to explain and relate to this document with the documents of their own culture;
- skills to discover and interact with other cultures: the ability to acquire new knowledge about a new culture and its current practices;
- critical awareness of cultures: the ability to evaluate critically and on the basis of explicit criteria perspectives, practices and products / results of their own culture and other cultures or countries.

All these elements are part of intercultural competence structure which can be formed and developed only through communication with others and with their own culture, through constructive interaction with them, drawing methods based on positive resolution of conflicts, reducing stereotypes and prejudices.

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